

# VSO PLACEMENT DESCRIPTION

*VSO tries to ensure that the information in Placement Descriptions is accurate at the time of writing. However, VSO relies on information received from external sources and circumstances can change. Placement Descriptions should be seen merely as a guide. VSO does not accept any liability in the event that any of the information is inaccurate.*

## Section A: Placement Summary

### 1. Placement details

**Job title:** Health Information Systems Analyst

**Employer:** Department of State for Health (DoSH)

<b>Address:</b>	<b>Postal</b>	<b>Location</b> (if different)
C/o VSO P.O. Box 677, Banjul, The Gambia, West Africa.		Directorate of Planning and Information DoSH

**Country:** The Gambia

#### **Key Duties and responsibilities of the volunteer** (as specific and detailed as possible)

The DoSH is currently advertising a two-phase consultancy to develop a Health Management Information System (HMIS). The consultants will be selected and begin work during the last quarter of 2001. Therefore the volunteer's duties will involve:

- To act as liaison between the members of the consultant group and the staff of the Directorate of Planning and Information, including the Epidemiology and Statistics Unit.
- To assist in identifying the essential information needs of end users at all levels of the health system, including central level managers and units, divisional health teams, health facilities and hospitals and communities.
- To be responsible for identifying locally available equipment and technical services needed to operate and maintain the developing HMIS.
- To assist in all aspects of the implementation phase of the HMIS as directed by the on-site consultant.
- To train DoSH counterparts in HMIS organisation and processes, and assisting in developing the position of HMIS Administrator, who would assume the work begun by the volunteer.
- To develop and conduct basic computer software and hardware troubleshooting training for computer users at the DoSH, focusing on the developing HMIS staff

The above two are essential features of the volunteer's work.

#### **Location of placement** (physical location, urban/rural, climate)

This is not an isolated posting. There are many VSO volunteers and personnel from various other international agencies, plus many ex-pats, living in this general area.

Directorate of Planning and Information is situated within the Department of State for Health, which is in Banjul. Banjul is on an island, which has restricted its growth, and it has few of the facilities associated with a capital city. The volunteer is therefore likely to live in either Bakau, Kanifing or Fajara, about twelve kilometres away and part of the growing urban area on the mainland - where most volunteers live. The VSO Programme Office is here, as are health facilities, shops, markets, recreational amenities and, best of all, the beach - with quiet stretches or busy beach bar areas. Travel into Banjul is easy and cheap using one of the many bush taxis.

The Gambia has two distinct seasons. June to October is the rainy season, which tends to be very hot and humid with temperatures reaching 36 degrees C and 90% humidity. This is followed by the dry season when the weather is often very cool and pleasant, particularly at the coast, although the temperatures start to rise in March and April. May can be dusty with the Harmattan wind blowing from the Sahara creating a film of sand over everything, including the volunteer.

**Social context of placement** (possibilities for integration and/or privacy, any security considerations, religious context, proximity to other expatriates/volunteers)

There are no religious considerations, except that the volunteer will be working in a predominantly Islamic culture and will need to show respect and tolerance towards this religion.

Privacy can sometimes be a problem at first when the volunteer is new and therefore something of a novelty, but this usually rectifies itself. In addition, foreigners are not that unusual a sight in this part of The Gambia. The downside to this is volunteers are sometimes mistaken for tourists, so an effort to learn a few choice phrases of the local language pays off!

There are several other VSO volunteers who work in Banjul and many who live in the Kanifing area.

Socially the difficulty of this placement is proximity to other ex-pats and the temptations of the tourist bars, restaurants and nightclubs – which cannot be easily afforded on local allowance. It will take considerable effort to establish social contacts with Gambians rather than with your volunteer colleagues; but is well worth the effort in terms of cultural exchange and knowledge gained.

The Gambia is reasonably safe as long as one is attentive and sensible. Of course there are pick-pockets, burglaries etc. – but far fewer than occur in Western cities. Overall, The Gambia is a very comfortable and safe place to live.

**Likely accommodation** (shared?/water?/electricity?)

Accommodation will depend on what there is in the area available to rent at the time the volunteer arrives. There is a considerable variation in the types of housing available in the Kombos area. It is unlikely that the volunteer will have to share although this cannot be guaranteed.

A volunteer can expect to have a living room, bedroom and kitchen with bath/shower room and toilet. Most, but not all, houses in this area have indoor bathrooms and toilets, although some are in separate buildings within a private yard. The volunteer will not normally be expected to share unless the house identified is a large one, which will allow sufficient privacy. Many houses are on family compounds, which are friendly, but tend to be noisy.

In the Bakau/Kanifing area there is a good clean water supply and electricity, although there are frequent power cuts.

## 2. Rationale for placement

### **Purpose of placement** (a summary to be expanded on in Section C)

In order to strengthen DoSH's programme management, as well as its planning and monitoring and evaluation capacities, the foundation for a comprehensive Health Management Information System (HMIS) is to be developed – thus the need for this placement.

## 3. Volunteer profile

### **Qualifications and work experience/skills required**

A minimum of a Bachelor's degree in Information Systems, Computer Systems Analysis or similar field and 3 to 5 years of work experience, preferably in health. Experience specifically in Health Management Information Systems would be useful

Demonstrated ability and experience in training others in the fields of data entry and computing

### **Personal qualities required** (including examples and any key selection dimensions)

Good organisation and communication skills and the willingness and patience to work with DoSH counterparts are very important qualities. Being able to listen to / work with others without being judgemental.

### **Language requirement**

Staff will all be able to work in English, however, a few words of Wolof, the local language in the capital, will be of considerable help locally, as well as with children you are treating and their parents. You will be given an introduction to Wolof during your orientation here and you will be able to take further lessons should you wish it.

### **Will the volunteer need to drive a car or motorbike? If so, give details.**

Not necessary. You will travel to work by the much used bush taxis; cars which operate like busses on set routes for fixed fees. They are cheap and readily available.

### **Any preference for male/female volunteer** (with reason if preference is stated)

None

### **Dietary considerations** (particularly for vegetarians)

In the capital area there is no restriction. A vegetarian might have some difficulty in eating socially with Gambians. Anyone with a peanut allergy should not consider this post as most local food is cooked in peanut oil.

### **Possibility of posting a partner with the volunteer**

Possibly, there are several other jobs in the capital.

## 4. Other information

### **Other VSO placements with same employer** (previous or current - inc. vol name, dates & job refs)

None

### **Other relevant VSO placements** (inc. dates & job refs)

Chris Perry, Systems Analyst – Department of State for Education – Feb 2000 – Feb 2002  
Benedict Sheahan, Accounts Trainer – Royal Victoria Hospital – Sept 2000 – Sept 2001

**Completed by** Elina Cole, PO

**Date Completed:** 29/03/01

**Date Revised:**

## Section B: Placement details

### 1. Details about the employing organisation

#### **Purpose or aims** (including target groups)

The Department of State for Health (DoSH) is responsible for developing policy and supervising all facilities and individuals providing health care in The Gambia, and for supervising, managing and supplying resources to all government-run health facilities in the country. The Directorate of Planning and Information (DPI) of DoSH is responsible for advising the planning of these services, evaluating expenditures and programmes and recommending policy and resource allocations. This is done (ideally) based upon information collected and analysed by the Epidemiology and Statistics Unit (ESU) within the DPI.

In order to strengthen DoSH's programme management, as well as its planning and monitoring and evaluation capacities, the foundation for a comprehensive Health Management Information System (HMIS) is to be developed – thus the need for this placement.

The immediate beneficiaries are the staff of the DPI, the ESU and the Divisional Health Teams. Indirectly, all users of the health care system in The Gambia will benefit from improved availability of information, as well as from improved planning and management of resources.

#### **Background information** (history, status, staffing, management style, structure)

DOSH consists of central level managers, planners and programme units, which do overall planning policy development and resource management. The six Divisional Health Teams are responsible for supervision and management of all health care deliveries within their divisions. These DHTs oversee both health facilities and village based practitioner. At each level information on performance, health conditions, service delivery and resources is collected. For co-ordination of these efforts this information must be analysed and used. This activity is co-ordinated at the Directorate of Planning and Information. That is where the volunteer will be working at. The volunteer will be directly responsible to the Director of Planning. The volunteer's principal counterparts will be the Senior Planner, Health Economist and the HMIS Administrator. However, the volunteer will also work with other staff within the epidemiology and statistics units.

The volunteer should expect to be interacting with other departments of state (education, finance and central statistics)

See attached "Description of Health Care System in The Gambia" for detailed information.

#### **Resources** (including funding, finances, facilities and equipment)

The Government of The Gambia has received a credit of \$18.0 million from the International Development Agency (IDA) for the Participatory Health, Population and Nutrition Project (PHPNP), managed by the Department of State for Health and Social Welfare (DoSH) with IDA support. The core of the system will include: the **Health Information System** (HIS, including Health Indicators Database, Reference Databases and Disease Control Database), the **Finance and Accounting Information System** (FMIS), the **Human Resources Information System** (HRIS) and the **Drugs Information System** (procurement and inventory management). To accomplish this, two consultancies are planned, at first to develop a guiding Master Plan, organisational structure and system architecture, and then a second to begin to implement that plan (See attached Terms of Reference). Funding for equipment, software, networking and training is included in the project budget. Details of the expenditures will, however, be determined by the master plan developed in the first phase of the consultancy.

Additional information on the current status of the Epidemiology and Statistics Unit is attached in "Health Information System in The Gambia".

**Protective equipment including HIV/AIDS protective equipment for health placements** (what the employer provides, normal practice of colleagues, who will provide equipment to the volunteer)

The position is an office assignment with no clinical or patient contact.

### **Identified needs of the organisation and plans for meeting them**

The overall goal of this project is to improve family health throughout the country. One of the PHPNP components focuses on management and implementation of the Family Health Programme. The ready availability of timely and accurate information is essential for effective management of the health system and for cost-effective planning that is responsive to the needs of the communities being served. In order to strengthen DoSH's programme management, as well as its planning and monitoring and evaluation capacities, the foundation for a comprehensive Health Management Information System (HMIS) is to be developed.

## **2. Details about the job**

### **How the job fits into the organisation structure** (level, line management, colleagues, etc.)

The systems analyst/technical assistant position will be an integral part of the Directorate of Planning and Information (DPI), essentially combining an advisory role with line management and training duties. These multiple roles will vary with the status of the consultants' progress. All members of the DPI staff will function as counterparts, from the Director through the unit Public Health Officers, and will include the health economist, HMIS administrator, health research specialist and senior planners. All these staff have a moderate to advance computer skills. However, the volunteer will be the most technically advanced person within the department and will be expected to train selected individuals in technical aspects.

### **Terms and conditions of work** (hours, salary, leave, etc.)

Monday through Thursday, 8 am to 4 pm; Friday, 8 am to 12:30 pm.

Salary: VSO living allowance plus housing and transport allowance for work. For any work-related trekking, transport will be provided by the DPI/ESU.

30 day annual leave plus usual public holidays.

Please note: in times of impending deadlines, professional level employees can be expected to work beyond the standard hours, although compensatory time will be certainly given.

### **Any additional resources necessary to make the placement effective** (& who will be responsible for providing these)

Office space, computer and all logistic support will be provided by the DPI or by the PHPNP.

### **Access to professional support** (within or outside the employing organisation)

The PHPNP management and senior DoSH managers will be available for any departmental professional support needed. Margaret Grant, a Health Information Consultant working in this unit has developed the background material and terms of reference for the consultancy, and will be working directly with the volunteer for the first four months. In addition, counterparts at the Department of State for Education (DoSE) who are also developing a networked Information System will be available for consultation and assistance. Additional resources include Information Technology volunteers with VSO and US Peace Corps, as well as contacts with Gambian IT companies (e.g., Quantum and Gamtel).

## **3. Funding**

### **Who will fund the volunteer allowance and accommodation?**

The Participatory Health, Population and Nutrition Project will fund the volunteer allowance and accommodation.

### **Details of any agreed or potential funding for other VSO costs**

None

## 4. Local context of placement

### **Socio-economic description of local community or suggested sources of information** (social/ethnic groups, occupations, historical factors, changes & developments)

#### Geography

The Gambia is a small country running west to east along either side of the River Gambia. In most places it is less than 30 miles wide and is about 400 miles long. It is very densely populated, with over 60% of its population under the age of 24 and is the fifth poorest country in which VSO works.

#### Social/Ethnic Groups

There are as many as 14 ethnic groups living in The Gambia with Mandinka mainly living rurally up-country, and Wollof being the largest community living in the urban areas, although there are also Fula, Jola, Sarrahuli and many other tribal groups interspersed in villages and urban areas. There is also a large Lebanese business community mainly dealing in the import/export sector located in Banjul. Mauritians also trade as local shopkeepers and stallholders integrated in local communities both rurally and in the urban area.

The Gambia is experiencing a rapid population growth combined with a growing refugee population from Sierra Leone, Casamance (Senegal) and most recently Guinea-Bissau.

#### Religion

There are no religious considerations, except that the volunteer will be working in a predominantly Islamic culture, although not fundamentalist, and will need to show respect and tolerance towards this religion. There are also several Christian churches represented throughout the country.

#### Security

The Gambia has been a relatively peaceful and safe country in which to live and work, however, in April 2000 there has been some civil unrest lasting 2/3 days, when students rioted in protest at the death of a fellow student. The resulting fatalities, when the military intervened, is the first experience The Gambia has had of this level of violence.

It is now one year since this event and the situation is calm and life has returned to normal. All volunteers are safe and security measures are in place should the need arise again. VSO will keep you informed of any changes or developments in the security situation should it be necessary.

### **Access to facilities** (markets, shops, medical facilities, places of worship, transport, mail system, social & leisure pursuits)

Banjul is on an island (at the mouth of the River Gambia) and its growth has been restricted by lack of space. Apart from the government departments, the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Museum, the Albert Market and the main ferry across the river to the North Bank and another passenger ferry to Senegal, there is little in Banjul and it has few facilities associated with a capital.

The volunteer is likely to live, in the Kanifing/Bakau/Fajara area – part of the growing urban area where the VSO programme office and many of the development agencies are situated. There are also health facilities, shops, supermarkets, recreational amenities and, best of all, the beach – with quiet stretches or busy beach bar areas. Swimming can be dangerous and there are times when it is not safe to venture into the sea. Some local hotel pools are made available on request to volunteers. Football and cricket are played around the Kombos area and there is a well-equipped gym at the stadium in Bakau.

These areas form part of the expanding residential areas of the Kombos region and

Serrekunda, is the centre of this most densely populated area with a large sprawling market offering every possible item, literally from a needle to a haystack (bales of grasses). Many imported goods are available from all over the world offering a staggering choice of items, although mainly of cheap quality.

#### Entertainment

There are many bars, restaurants and clubs in the area and sometimes very good live music at the stadium. There are some local cinemas around but the videos shown tend to be lively action packed movies with lots of shouting, shooting and blood. However, Alliance Francaise provides a pleasant alternative with an outdoor auditorium (only in the dry season, of course) and selected films in English with French sub-titles or French speaking only. Remember that on a volunteer allowance these can only be accessed sparingly.

#### Mail/Telephone/E-mail

There is no internal mail system and mail is usually collected from the Programme Office. E-mail and faxes can be received at the Programme Office. There are now several Internet cafes available in Kombos and many volunteers have set up their own e-mail addresses. The telephone system is one of the best in Africa and international phone calls are usually easy to make and cost D45 for 3 minutes to UK (currently £2.50).

#### Medical Services

The Medical Research Council (MRC) has a research hospital in Fajara, next door to the VSO Programme Office. There is also a clinic at the British High Commission opposite the Programme Office that volunteers attend. In addition, there are government medical clinics and the Royal Victoria Hospital in Banjul. These can sometimes lack the appropriate drugs or staff to administer them. For serious hospital treatment the volunteer would return to the UK.

#### Travel

Travel into Banjul is easy and cheap using one of the many bush vans or taxis (which travel set routes and charge set prices, like busses) with the journey taking about 20 minutes. The only form of mechanised travel within The Gambia is bush taxi or local GPTC buses, which also travel to Basse, the main town at the other end of the river, 400km approx. and six hours away, on a good day.

#### Dietary considerations

There are no dietary constraints upon this posting (although a strict vegetarian might find it difficult to eat socially with Gambians). There are many local markets nearby in Bakau and Serrekunda, and these will sell fresh fruit and vegetables, fish, tinned food and dried foodstuffs. There are also supermarkets with imported goods but these are aimed at the tourist and expatriate residents here and tend to be quite expensive. Anyone with a reaction to peanuts should consider this posting seriously as (groundnuts) peanuts are the staple crop in The Gambia and are used frequently in cooking. However, there are many alternative foods available in the Kombos region.

## **Section C: Placement rationale**

### **Objectives of the placement and indicators for evaluating the achievement of each**

**objective** (to be reviewed by the volunteer, employer and programme office once the volunteer is in their placement)

**Objectives**

to provide a liaison person with the appropriate technical knowledge to facilitate the work of the HMIS consultants

to provide continuity and follow-up on their recommendations and activities

to function as a communications link between the consultants and the DPI.

To be active in technical training of selected personnel within the DoSH (DPI, ESU and Divisional Health Teams) to troubleshoot and do minor maintenance of the computer resources.

**Indicators**

*That staff have an improved understanding of the structure, processes and technology of health management information systems.*

*This can be evaluated by the progress of consultants work and by the degree to which the DPI staff feel they understand the process.*

*The number of personnel trained and the degree to which they can handle simple problems can be assessed*

**Significant assumptions or constraints**

Significant assumptions: 1. The consultants will be in place by November 2001. (Request For Proposal has been prepared and is being sent to a short-list of five firms which have already responded to an earlier solicitation of expressions of interest.); 2. The selected firm produces the expected HMIS master plan; 3. IDA continues to approve funding of the HMIS development and implementation of the master plan and DoSH is able to respond to the recommendations (e.g., staffing); 4. The volunteer adapts well to the working and living environment.

**How the placement will promote the sharing of skills or building capabilities** (including how many people will directly or indirectly benefit from the placement)

DoSH at both central and peripheral levels has access to, and a demonstrated need for, IT and general computing resources. The knowledge and skills of the DoSH staff need to be increased in order to adequately use and maintain these resources, to sustain the technical progress that has been made, and to enhance planning capacity throughout the DoSH.

In this placement you will be involved in sharing skills and building capabilities in various ways. Your professional skills of training and coaching will be shared directly with identified staff both within and without DPI. It is not only your professional skills (Formal) however that will affect your experience in The Gambia, but also those skills which are Informal – as shown below:

**Formal**

Training  
Coaching

**Informal**

Peer Support  
Role Modelling  
Mentoring  
Facilitation  
Observation  
Feedback  
Discussion  
Planning and analytical skills

It is necessary to recognise however, that for you to be able to share both these formal and informal skills, certain others are also necessary. For example, you need to be able to: advise without appearing arrogant; help others understand without making them feel dictated to;



encourage and motivate people so that they are keen to work on any new developments; find ways to include everyone and to build a sense of working together; avoid being dominant and imposing your views; assuming a certain way of doing something is the only way; be diplomatic and respectful of management structures and lines of authority; be tolerant by showing patience, even if you do not feel it; listen actively and negotiate supportively; and finally, take time to understand the local context and work practices.

### **How the placement will fit into the planned partnership between VSO and the employing organisation**

The Department of State for Health is at central government level and this is the first direct VSO placement at such level. However, we have volunteers at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Bansang Hospital and Central Laboratories all of which DoSH is their line ministry. This placement we hope would strengthen the partnership.

### **How the placement will contribute to the aims of the VSO country programme (including which disadvantaged groups it aims to benefit and how it seeks to address the different needs of men and women)**

The vast majority of the population of The Gambia (all ages, male and female) rely upon the government facilities and personnel for their health care. Improving the planning and resource management capacity of the DoSH will benefit them all.

### **Suggested activities for first 6 months of the placement with indicators to monitor progress for each activity**

Initially you will be full of energy and eager to get on with the objectives set in the placement description, however, adjusting to and respecting very different time frames and work ethics may prove frustrating at the beginning. It is important that feelings of frustration and disappointment do not affect the working relationships which you will be trying to establish. The most important objectives for the first six months will be taking time to settle in, understanding the culture and protocols and building open and trusting relationships, as follows:-

- **Orientation and familiarisation with DoSH – meeting with the major participants in the HMIS**

*Indicator: That the volunteer is developing a network of contacts within and without the DoSH*

- **Work with the consultant firm to determine information needs of potential users of the HMIS and evaluate training needs for the system users.**

*Indicator: The volunteer understands what the needs and the uses of the information system are for all the units both central and divisional*

- **Develop and begin to implement basic computer troubleshooting and maintenance training for selected (relatively skilled) DoSH personnel. Curricula have already been developed by Peace Corps and VSO volunteers and are available as resources.**

*Indicator: That the volunteer would have reviewed available resources, make recommendations and adapt where necessary.*

*Draw up a training schedule for trainees.*

## Section D: Sources of information

### Who was involved/consulted in assessing the placement

Margaret Grant, Health Information consultant, ESU  
K. O. Jaiteh, Assistant Director Health Promotion and Protection  
Momodou Fatajo, Acting Head, ESU  
Dawda Joof, PHPNP Project Manager

### Other sources of information for the volunteer's self-briefing (e.g. recommended books or videos, link organisations in UK, relevant websites, etc.)

Potential candidates can contact Chris Perry, Systems Analyst for Department of State for Education. E-mail address [chrisperry@qanet.gm](mailto:chrisperry@qanet.gm)

### Attachments to this placement description

Description of the Health Care System in The Gambia  
Health Information System in The Gambia  
Terms of Reference for HMIS Consultancy

<b>Completed by</b>	Elina Cole, PO
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<b>Date</b>	24/04/01
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